1: Metraux E-5 (1934-1935) 1940
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2

SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TATTOOING

304 [831] Little is known of the symbolic value of tattooing. According to Geiseler (87, pp. 29-36), the vulva tattooed on the breast was an ensign of married chiefs; according to Stolpe (214, p. 10) it indicated only that the young man who wore this mark had watched the carnal union of a couple.

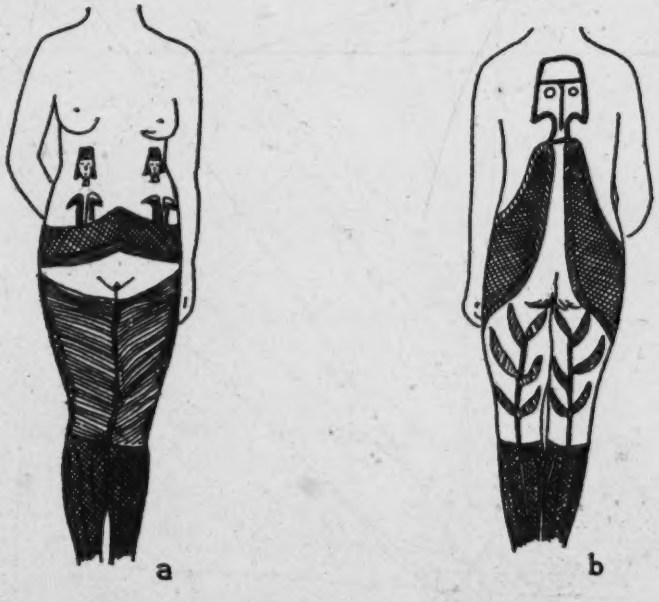

FIGURE 36.—Tattooing of a woman: *a*, front view; *b*, back view (from Thomson, 215, fig. 4).

[833] One of the tattooed old women interviewed by Knoche (171, p. 16) told him that the *rapa* tattooed on her back represented one of her first lovers. This tattooing was done in youth, after the first sexual intercourse.

[832] The natives sometimes interpreted figures on petroglyphs as tattoo patterns. Series of small concavities carved on the rocks, strongly suggest the dots tattooed across the forehead.

According to my informant, the first tattooing was made on the leg when a child was about eight years old. Geiseler (87, p. 35) states that young people were tattooed between their twelfth and their seventeenth year.